

## 2015 Costume Symposium: Behind the Scenes in New York City

July 30 - August 1, 2015

### **Amanda Whitfield** *Costume Symposium*

The 2015 USITT Costume Symposium, *The Changing Scape of the Costume Business: Behind the Scenes in New York City*, exposed 40 costume designers from around the country to the inner workings of the costume industry in New York City. The three day symposium covered Broadway lectures, backstage tours, museum talks, and working as a designer in film and television.

Our first panel discussion, at IATSE Wardrobe Union Local 764, explored the changing scape of the business and profiled seasoned Broadway professionals: dresser Shannon Kroger, wardrobe supervisor Robert Guy, and the Tony award-winning designer Ann Hould-Ward. In the afternoon, designer Andrea Lauer presented the scope of her work on Broadway that includes credits such as *American Idiot* and *Bring it On, the Musical*. Andrea discussed her collaborations with choreographer Elizabeth Streb and shared garments developed in her studio *RISEN from the Thread* that incorporate new technologies for stroke patient rehabilitation. Andrea's work exemplifies the importance of diversifying your talents as a designer living in New York. As stated by participant Kiersten Kozbial, "the symposium was absolutely incredible and informative! As a college student who is still new to the theater industry, it was amazing to hear from seasoned professionals and see more about what happens behind the scenes on Broadway shows. My absolute favorite thing was Andrea Lauer's lecture about how she works. So worthwhile, educational, and fun!"

Day two of the symposium was located in Queens where many production houses,

including the TDF Costume Collection, have relocated from Manhattan. Our tour began at Kaufmann Astoria Studios, the Managing Director of TDF Costume Collection, Stephen Cabral, led a special lecture that included the history of the collection while sharing some of the collections “special things worn by special people.” Stephen used examples of various 19<sup>th</sup> century empire dresses to demonstrate the variety of the 80,000 piece collection and to explain how the collections aesthetic evolves as contemporary designers create lighter and brighter costumes. Another highlight in Queens was our tour of Helen Uffner Vintage Clothing, Helen and the talented costume designer Mimi Maxmen discussed utilizing the collection for production in film and theater. The day concluded with a chat from the assistant costume designer, Sue Gandy of *Person of Interest* at Silver Cup Studios.

The participants had a great time all around. “A most wonderful and interesting symposium” said Donnette Perkins. “Highlights for me: *China Through the Looking Glass* exhibit at the MMA, Helen Uffner’s racks of beautiful 1930s cotton dresses, the opportunity to hear from two Broadway designers and the panel discussion at IATSE. The days were packed with fun, informative activities and every night I was able to see a new play. So much fun!”